

Life skills course cooks up teen nutrition lessons

The Chicago Area Project life skills program called Rites of Passage takes teens through 12 weeks of classes to prepare them for life as they move toward adulthood. Youth learn about budgeting, finding housing, setting up utilities and taking care of their everyday needs like food.

It is no secret that everyone needs to eat. However eating well, eating nutritiously and eating on a budget is a mystery to most people, especially young people. It is one thing to tell a teenager that while pizza may include tomatoes, cheese and bread, it doesn't cover all the important nutritional needs. CAP is taking that lesson out of the theoretical by giving youth hands-on experience with food.

Leaving the traditional classroom setting behind, teenagers had a field trip to the All Seasons Gourmet Kitchen, located at 432 N. Elizabeth in Chicago. There they prepared a full dinner, as well as dessert. Three chefs, including the restaurant's founder, provided the professional teaching skills.

Their menu included meatloaf, mashed potatoes and tossed salad. Pie-Pudding made with straw-

berries and pineapple ended the meal on a sweet note. This "edible" teachable moment extended through four courses, peppered with frank discussion about health and careers. With all of the energetic activity, the youth did not notice how much they actually learned including:

- Experience in meal planning and budgeting
- Skills in baking, chopping, boiling and mashing
- Training in meal preparation and later meal testing
- Exposure to career paths in the culinary profession
- Instruction on hygiene and safety when handling food
- Inspiration and confidence from completing the tasks

"Our goal at CAP is to show youth that, if given the chance, they can do more than they might expect. They now have skills that will stay with them for life," said Howard Lathan, CAP Associate Executive Director.

The event was a real treat for the adults, who also enjoyed working with the young people. They offered advice and motivation to keep pursuing goals in and out of the kitchen. This hands-on



Youth in the Rites of Passage life skills program learn to prepare meatloaf under the watchful eye of professional chefs at the All Seasons Gourmet Kitchen.

component of the life skills course will continue for future courses. Youth will put their skills to the test and prepare a meal for themselves and their guests at their graduation event.

Every youth in DCFS care should complete a life skills assessment at age 14, 16, and 20. Life skills courses, like this one presented by CAP and many other community organizations, can provide valuable lessons so youth can be successful after they leave the child welfare system. For more information on this and other Life Skills programs, contact the DCFS Division of Service Intervention at 312/814-5959.

Start the new year with an education “tune-up” with these tips

Educational issues may be confusing, and everyone needs help at some time. At this point, school has been in session long enough for issues to surface. The good news is that there is still time to address them. Caseworkers and caregivers working together can most often successfully advocate for the children in their care. When you need more help, contact the DCFS Education Advisors. They provide educational support to families with licenses supervised by DCFS and to post-adoption and guardianship homes. Private agency homes can contact the education liaison at each agency.

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These tips from the education advisors can help caregivers prepare their students for success.

Keep communication lines open

In order to have the school year be successful, it is important for both the caseworker and caregiver to have ongoing contact with the school. Some of the activities may include:

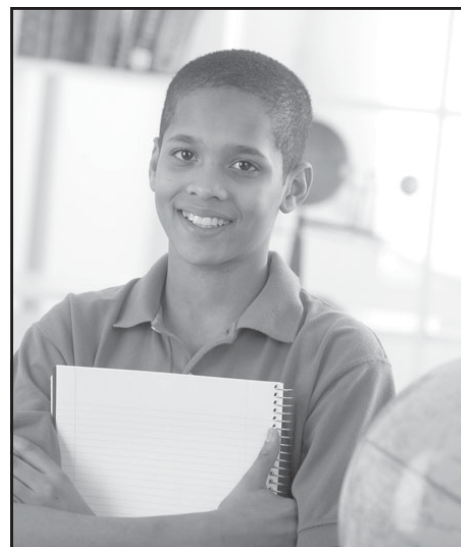
- Attend parent-teacher conferences and school functions
- Encourage the student's participation in academic and extracurricular activities
- Monitor homework
- Touch base with school teachers and related school personnel
- Review progress reports
- Arrange for individual problem solving meetings if needed
- Express your concerns before they turn into a crisis
- Express appreciation when things go right

Be proactive on homework

- **Set a Spot.** Have a 'homework spot' in the house. There should be a special desk or table that is simply for homework. There should be

no outside distractions like television or the radio.

- **Set a Timer.** Do homework at the same time each day. Set a timer for when it starts and an alarm for when it ends.
- **Set Goals.** Have your child show you what he/she is going to do before going to the 'homework spot.' Have them explain what they are doing so you know they understand the directions.
- **See the Results.** Have your child show you what he/she accomplished during the time in the 'homework spot'. Don't grade it, but check it for completeness and neatness.
- **Control the homework.** Don't let it control you. If you make a routine a habit, it will become less threatening and more a part of life. Homework is supposed to help your child develop life skills such as time management.



Education “tune-up”, con’t.

Be involved in discipline plans

- School districts are required to provide students with copies of school discipline policies and to provide copies of discipline procedures upon request. Make sure you have copies, and review the procedures with the children for whom you are responsible.
- At any time a child is suspended more than twice in a semester, the caseworker and caregiver should meet with the school and develop or revise a behavior plan for the student.
- For any student who faces expulsion the caregiver should contact the caseworker immediately. Through the DCFS Guardian’s office, each child will be ensured legal representation, if needed.
- If any child is not enrolled in school or for assistance regarding suspensions and expulsions contact the appropriate education advisor’s office.

Help students participate with the right permission

When papers come home from school, a parent’s first inclination may be to sign a permission slip and turn it back in. However, when children are in foster care, that cannot be the assumption. Foster parents are authorized and encouraged to sign consents for many general school-related activities, including:

Caregivers may sign for general school related activities, like:

- Field trips within Illinois
- Routine social events
- School enrollment
- Attendance at sporting events

- Extra-curricular activities (other than athletics)
- Cultural events
- Special education consents

Caseworkers need to arrange for consent for:

- Athletic participation (Includes cheerleading and dance teams)
- Media coverage/events
- Photographs/videotapes
- Voice reproductions
- Research projects
- Field trips outside of Illinois
- Liability releases
- Medical examinations or care

College help in Cook County

Introspect is a community-based agency that can advise students on how to pick a college, discover financial aid resources and assist with the application process from undergraduate coursework all the way through the doctoral level. The agency is located in Chicago and focuses on Cook County.

The organization primarily serves youth in care. However, young people who aged out of the system, left through adoption or guardianship, and even those who had never been in care can also receive assistance.

For more information, contact Bernard Clay at 773-287-2290.

A second program called Project Success focuses on helping adults 19 or older attend the college of their choice. The program’s service area includes Chicago and the south suburbs. Project Success targets students from low-income households who are the first in the family to go to college. Yet, the organization also can assist students in other circumstances. Project Success can provide career counseling, college search services, and financial aid counseling. Project Success also does presentations to groups of young people or the adults who support them.

To get an application for the program, call 773-995-2371.

Cook North Welcomes New Adoption Advisory Council Members

Cook North now has two new representatives to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council. Michelle Seidl and Dorothy McGhee answered the call for candidates and, after interviews in the regions, the DCFS Director appointed them to the council.



Dorothy McGhee

Dorothy McGhee is an adoptive parent, a relative caregiver, and a traditional foster parent. McGhee is licensed by Lifelink and has provided foster care to more

than 25 children. She adopted three boys, several years ago. Two of her sons are now 15 and the other is 13. She maintains an open relationship with their families. In addition, she has worked towards reunification for another youth in her home.

McGhee was raised in the Illinois foster care system and was emancipated from care after graduating from Vanderbilt University in Tennessee through a state-sponsored education program. She is active in the Local Area Network (LAN 80) community. She works part-time as a volunteer for the Peer Parent Education Network, which is a program of the Grand Boulevard Federation. She is a parent advocate and trainer for the Family Resource Center on Disabilities and is a member of the Northeast Foster Parent Association.

McGhee brings a wealth of knowledge and experiences to her position with the council. She is enthusiastic about participating and being able to give something back, as well as impact change for children and families involved in the adoption system.



Michele Seidl

Michele Seidl and her husband are currently licensed as adoptive parents through Bethany Christian Services. They have adopted two children internation-

ally from Korea as infants. They have a son, age four, and a daughter, age one. Seidl speaks very passionately about their adoption experience, both the challenges and the wonders. At this time in her life and career, she feels that she is able to influence change, working within the child welfare and adoptive communities. She recently re-organized her work schedule to a three-day workweek to be able to pursue these personal interests.

Seidl is a staunch advocate for education and was with the Pew Charitable Trust for almost six years. While at the Trust, she managed projects, including the annual report card, *Measuring Up*, which grades higher education performance in each of the 50 states. In addition, she developed education reform strategies, and planned and designed initiatives to further public policy concerning educational goals.

Seidl has a strong belief that every child deserves a parent and is interested in issues related to adoption, children and education. She wants to learn more about the process as well as be a part of the solution to problem solve and influence change.

The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council addresses issues and policies that directly impact the lives of children who leave DCFS through adoption or guardianship. The Adoption Council has tackled issues including revisions to the subsidy contract, respite care and post-adoption services. The meetings are held six times a year rotating between Chicago, Springfield and Bloomington. All meetings are open to the public.

The next meeting of the council will be February 2 at the Eastland Suites Conference Center in Bloomington. The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council is chaired by Elizabeth Richmond, an adoptive parent from Peoria and Jim Jones, CEO of ChildServ. For more information or to reach representatives of the Illinois Adoption Council, call the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422.

Cook North covers local foster care issues

The region also has representatives serving on the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council. They bring information back to the local council and report on regional issues that could apply statewide.

Cecil Garner currently represents the Cook North Region on the statewide council. Ruth Dominguez recently stepped down from the council, after a year of service. That position is open at this time.

Cook North administration invites all foster, adoptive and guardian-ship parents to be part of the local Cook North Regional Advisory Council. The council meets monthly to discuss policy changes and address regional concerns. Training credits are often available. **The Regional Advisory Council meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 10:30 a.m. at 1911 S. Indiana Ave.** For more information, call 312-328-2484.

Cook North survey results are in...

Thanks go to all of the foster parents who completed the Cook North region's recent survey regarding foster care experiences and training needs. The following are some of the results of the survey:

Foster home location

- 40% of the responses were from the North/Northwest suburbs
- 27% were from the north side of the city
- 33% were from the south end of the region

Years of foster care service

Cook North region has many long-time foster care providers. Of those who answered the survey, almost 60 percent had been foster parents five years or more.

- 6% less than a year
- 12 % 1-2 years
- 24% 3-5 years
- 29% 5-10 years and
- 29% more than 15 years

Foster parent training

Only 27 percent of the survey respondents had attended a regional training in the previous six months. Reasons for not attending included:

- 31% Meeting Time
- 31% Meeting Location
- 13% Transportation
- 6% Childcare issues
- 20% Not interested

Many caregivers expressed interest in a variety of training topics that we will work with our Foster Parent Training Team to implement over the next year. Some of the topics include:

- Parenting adolescents
- Parenting special needs youth
- Behavior Management
- Parenting children with ADHD

For more information on participating on the region's Foster Parent Training Team or upcoming trainings, contact Iris Cuevas at 773-866-5680.

Cook Central Council learns about kids' mental health

The Cook Central Advisory Council makes sure that the monthly meetings are informative and productive. At most meetings foster and adoptive families can earn training credit hours toward re-licensing.

At the November meeting, Dr. Janet Chandler from the DCFS Division of Clinical Services spoke on parenting children who have a mental illness. She talked about the related challenges of substance abuse and medication management.

This presentation was particularly important because placement stability often may be jeopardized if a child's mental illness is either undetected or mismanaged. Dr. Chandler was able to describe the most common illnesses seen in most children in foster care. She helped foster parents to identify the symptoms they were seeing in their children who have mental illnesses. Dr. Chandler discussed the pros and cons of psychotropic medications, side effects and comparisons of different treatments. Caregivers who missed the meeting can contact Adrienne Welenc, Lead Support Specialist at 773-292-7879 for more information.

The Council meets the last Tuesday of each month at 3518 W. Division beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Cook South parent advisory group starts fresh

At the end of 2006, the Regional Administrator Michael Byrd committed his support for refreshing the Regional Advisory Council of foster parents with a membership surge and a more focused mission. Now the council moves into the new year with a slate full of new business. Recent meetings have seen more attendance and enthusiastic participation. Currently, the council is setting its strategic objectives and preparing for an election of officers.

"It is important that foster parents have a voice in what we do in our region. The council helps them know what's happening and lets us know how our actions affect their families, good and bad," said Byrd.

The Cook South Regional Advisory Council meets at the DCFS regional office at 6201 S. Emerald Avenue on the third Wednesday of each month at 10 a.m.

These are open meetings. Foster, adoptive and guardianship parents from private agencies and the DCFS program are welcome to attend. In addition to discussing policy and practice, the agenda often includes training topics that qualify for training hours.

Questions about the Cook South Regional Advisory Council can be directed to Gloria Long Orange at 773-371-6115.

Whether basketball or football, kids win during the holidays

On December 9, Connie Payton of the Walter and Connie Payton Foundation and a sleigh full of toys pulled up to three Cook County DCFS offices for parties with foster children and their caregivers. Then on December 17, the Chicago Bulls invited families receiving intact services to a festival at their "winter wonderland" at the Bull/Sox Training Academy training facility in Lisle. Both days were magical for young people looking for some holiday happiness.

"We understand joyful moments can sometimes be hard to find for the youth we serve. But with the Payton Foundation taking care of youth in care and the Bulls looking out for the intact families, we can send a message of hope to them all," said Erwin McEwen, acting DCFS Director.

The Payton Foundation's Holiday Giving Program provided gifts to all youth in foster care and included youth in institutions, independent living programs, the



Connie Payton greeted youth with Michael Byrd, Cook South Regional Administrator. She also visited families at the Cook Central and Cook South regional holiday parties.

armed forces and college students. Connie Payton was joined in the effort by Dominick's, which donated the refreshments for the three parties. Just like Santa, Mrs. Payton had many stops to make that Saturday. DCFS held gatherings at 1911 S. Indiana, 6201 S. Emerald and 3518 W. Division. At each site DCFS staff (and sometimes family and friends) volunteered numerous hours to unload, sort and distribute the gifts. Add in music and decorations and hundreds of happy guests, and you have good memories to last throughout the year.



Andres Nocioni and Bulls teammates hosted a party for DCFS families at the Chicago Bulls/Chicago White Sox Training Academy.

The following Sunday, Santa's sleigh was powered by Bulls rather than reindeer. Luol Deng, Chris Duhon, Andres Nocioni and Thabo Sefolosha served lunch and handed out presents on center court. DCFS also partnered with Harlem Irving Plaza, Dominick's, McDonald's Corporation and Barnes and Noble to make this event memorable for Cook families receiving services from DCFS.

Cook children SOAR with art and recreation opportunities

Youth flourish when art, music and recreation are in their lives. Those endeavors are invaluable, and usually come with a price tag. However, young people in foster care can explore a variety of cultural and recreational activities that will enhance their lives.

Project S.O.A.R. (Statewide Opportunities for Art and Recreation) is sponsored by DCFS to bring free classes to youth throughout the Cook County regions.

Classes include music, art, media, dance and drama, and are conducted weekly to coincide with the school calendar. Youth ages 3 to 18 who are still under the care of DCFS can enroll in the following classes.

After-School in the Arts
Ballet
Percussion
Black Ensemble/New Directions
Photography
Cello
Piano
Children's Choir
Project Butterfly
Chorus
Tap
Dance
Circus Workshop
Teen Program
Clarinet
Tumbling
Dance Forms
Violin
Discover Music/Discover Life
Visual Art
Flute

Registration is by phone only at 312/814-4145, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Students will be able to register for a maximum of two classes per session.

Transportation is provided based on need, availability, class location and newly implemented transportation guidelines. Upon registration, please ask for details regarding transportation provisions.

Cook County Advocate reporters

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Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

Wrong regional insert?

The IL Families Now and Forever newsletter publishes with four regional editions. The main section goes to all readers, but into the middle there is a regional insert for local news:

- Cook County Advocate
- Central Connections (Central Region)
- Our Kids (Southern Region)
- Northern News (Northern Region)

Homes in each of these areas should automatically receive a newsletter with the corresponding insert. However, no system is perfect, and when there is a problem the answer comes up Cook. We are aware that the mailing records are incorrect for some homes.

Currently the DCFS technology office is working on a solution to make certain all homes receive the correct edition. Caregivers who do not receive the right edition can send an email to the Editor at Vanessa.James@illinois.gov or call 312-814-6824.

Local articles about programs and services in the community are important. The regional reporters and I are working hard to bring both general and regional information that families can use.



Vanessa James

Cook County Training Calendar

Important Information!

The DCFS Office of Training is realigning the training offerings across the state. Training for the regions is now coordinated by DCFS in Springfield. This shift includes many improvements to make it easier for caregivers to register for classes, track their training credits and participate in more classroom or Internet-based offerings.

The new schedules for In-Service training classes are being developed. When classes are confirmed, schedules will be announced on this page in future issues of IL Families Now and Forever. For more information call 877-800-3393.

DCFS Lending Library offers alternatives for education credits

The DCFS Lending Library can be used as a convenient alternative for obtaining approved training credit for license renewal. Licensed foster and adoptive parents can borrow materials for a two-week period at no charge.

The Lending Library catalogue highlights a multitude of books, audio cassettes and videos for self-directed training in parenting and family life, spanning 17 categories. Following are a few titles of interest:

Winning Cooperation From your Child

by Kenneth Wenning, Ph.D.

This book provides strategies for parents to help a defiant child develop behavioral and emotional control when provoked, teased, or frustrated. Credit: 2 hours

Taming The Dragon In Your Child: Solutions for Breaking the Cycle of Family Anger

by Meg Eastman

This book discusses how to determine whether anger is a normal expression of hurt, fear, and frustration, or if it is a warning sign of a more serious cycle of family stress. Practical answers about how to stop angry tirades and teach children to express anger responsibly are provided. Credit: 4 hours

Managing the Defiant Child

by Russell A. Barkley

Sometimes parents need to modify their own behavior in order to change their child's behavior. The day to day struggles of three families who have children with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) are followed in the video.

Credit: 30 minutes

Common Sense Discipline: Building Self-Esteem in Young Children

by Grace Mitchell

This book provides you with information and strategies on successfully disciplining your child. You will learn to teach children to feel better about themselves and enable them to be "happy and confident" so they may not feel the need to act out. Real life stories are used as examples. Credit: 4 hours

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To borrow these or one of the myriad titles in the Lending Library, simply fill out the order form at the back of the catalogue. Send it to the DCFS Office of Training, Station 122, 406 E. Monroe, Springfield IL 62701.

To request a catalogue, call 877-800-3393. The catalogue is also available on the DCFS web site: <http://www.state.il.us/DCFS/docs/lendinglibrary.pdf>.

Lending Library Categories

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Children with Sexually Aggressive Behaviors
- Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Children with Behavioral Disorders/Emotional Disturbances
- Disciplinary Strategies for Difficult Children
- Separation and Visitation
- Drug-Affected Infants and Children
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects (FAS/FAE)
- The Medically Complex Child
- The Child With HIV/AIDS
- Promoting Educational Success Through Improved Learning Skills
- Building A Healthy Self-Esteem in Kids
- From Foster Care to Adoption
- Child Development and Parenting
- Parenting Adolescents
- Families and Diversity-Parenting with Greater Understanding
- Children With Mental Health, Language and Physical Challenges